

FINAL BILL REPORT

SSB 6759

C 234 L 10
Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Regarding development of a plan for a voluntary program of early learning.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education (originally sponsored by Senators Kauffman, Oemig, Prentice and Kline).

Senate Committee on Early Learning & K-12 Education
Senate Committee on Ways & Means
House Committee on Early Learning & Children's Services
House Committee on Education Appropriations

Background: The Department of Early Learning (DEL) was established in 2006 as an executive branch agency. The primary duties of DEL are to implement early learning policy and to coordinate, consolidate, and integrate child care and early learning programs in order to administer programs and funds efficiently. In 2007 the Legislature established the Early Learning Advisory Council (ELAC) to advise DEL on statewide early learning needs and to develop a statewide early learning plan.

Under article IX, section 1 of the Washington State Constitution, "It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders ..." The courts have interpreted this to mean that the state must define a program of basic education and amply fund it from a regular and dependable source. Until September 1, 2011, the program evolving from the Basic Education Act must include the goal of the school system, which includes the opportunities to develop knowledge and skills in various subjects, the instructional program made available by school districts; and the determination and distribution of state resources to support the instructional program. Under current Washington law, each school district's kindergarten through twelfth grade basic educational program must be accessible to all students who are five-years-old and less than 21.

The Quality Education Council (QEC) was created in 2009 to recommend and inform the ongoing legislative implementation of a program of basic education and necessary financing. The QEC is composed of eight legislative members, and one representative each from the Office of the Governor, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the State Board of Education, the Professional Educator Standards Board, and DEL.

Summary: DEL, OSPI, and Thrive by Five's recommendations to the Governor and the QEC's recommendations to the Legislature suggested that a voluntary program of early

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learning should be included within the overall program of basic education. The Legislature intends to examine these recommendations through the development of a working group to identify and recommend a comprehensive plan.

A technical working group is created beginning April 1, 2010, to develop a comprehensive plan for a voluntary program of early learning. The working group is convened by OSPI and DEL, but must be monitored and overseen by the QEC. The working group has a progress report due to ELAC and the QEC July 1, 2011, and a final report and plan due November 1, 2011.

The plan must examine the opportunities and barriers of at least two options: a program of early learning under the program of basic education and a program of early learning as an entitlement, either statutorily or constitutionally protected. The working group must, at a minimum, include in the plan the following recommendations for each option:

- criteria for eligible children;
- program standards, including, but not limited to, direct services to be provided, number of hours per school year, teacher qualifications, and transportation requirements;
- performance measures;
- criteria for eligible providers, specifying whether or not they may be approved, certified, or licensed by DEL and public, private, nonsectarian, or sectarian organizations;
- governance responsibilities for the OSPI and DEL;
- funding necessary to implement a voluntary program of early learning, including, but not limited to, early learning teachers, professional development, facilities, and technical assistance;
- a timeline for implementation; and
- Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)'s role in the new program of early learning.

The working group must review early learning programs in Washington State and elsewhere. The membership includes representatives from DEL, OSPI, a nongovernmental private-public partnership, the Attorney General's Office, two members of ELAC, and other stakeholders appointed by ELAC.

ELAC must appoint two members, as well as stakeholders with expertise in early learning, to sit on the technical working group.

The QEC must submit a report to the Legislature by January 1, 2012, with recommendations for a comprehensive plan for a voluntary program of early learning. Before submitting the report, the QEC must seek input from ELAC.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	47	0	
House	69	29	(House amended)
			(Senate refused to concur)
House	81	16	(House receded/amended)

Senate 48 0 (Senate concurred)

Effective: June 10, 2010